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Child Labor Proclamation Did Not
Ruffle Shortgrass Country Parents

By Monte Noelke

MERTZON — The recent government ruling limiting the employment of kids 16 years old and under is being treated with indifference in the Shortgrass Country. Any anticipated wholehearted approval by parent organizations has not been forthcoming; youth groups have ignored the law.

Perhaps the hot July sun or city Monte Noelke rioting has muted the populace; or it could be that news from Washington has been so unfavorable to ranch people for the past 20 years that nothing will prompt our local citizens to speak out.

The fact is, the Labor Department's action is an old idea out here. Ever since this country was settled, men have questioned the wisdom of working youngsters. As fathers and mothers became aware of how much their strength was being sapped by directing attention of their prodigies to chores around the ranch, they realized that only young, strongwilled parents would ever be able to achieve any worthwhile progress along this line.

Sometime shortly after the turn of the century the subject of child labor was discussed to the extent that a timetable was devised to guide adults in harnessing youthful energy. The schedule, in brief, looked like this:

1. To induce a boy or girl to hoe three or four rows of a small garden, the parent should allow a minimum of three hours daily for threatening, cajoling, and ultimately thrashing the subject.
2. A child's mind can be conditioned hauling in wood and dumping ashes by reserving two full working days a week for lectures by the supervisor. In particularly truculent cases, a few taps with a rawhide quirt will often speed the process.
3. To accomplish the entire operation of milking a cow, attending the chickens and feeding the hogs, the adult should apply the old 8-to-45 ratio. That is, the administrator should be prepared to spend eight hours of his own time for every 45 minutes of actual work completed by the youngster. Again, balky individuals can be encouraged to cooperate by including a few sessions with the rod.

Although this set of standards is over 60 years old, it continues to console parents through the throes of coaxing their offspring to work. The chores have undergone a radical change, yet an administrator is still pitted against administratee in a struggle to accomplish the same goals.

As an example, many time pressed housewives are finding that inducing the kids to forsake the telephone long enough to punch the button on an automatic dishwasher is one of the biggest challenges in running a modern household. Parents are learning that to untrack Junior from the television set and get him to put out the trash is equal to revamping the entire garbage collection system of Manhattan Island. They realize that sending a boy to put out the cat may easily mean an organized hunt for both the boy and old Tom.

Therefore, the people's silence in the Shortgrass Country upon hearing about the Labor Department's edict is a mystery. I would have bet big money that many of my friends would overload the mails in praising the action, since it relieves them of the great labor involved in persuading youngsters to do small tasks. But I guess the first good report in two decades just wasn't enough to arouse anyone's enthusiasm.